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Gerardo de Simone, Emanuele Pellegrini - predella@predella.it

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Reframing a Revolution: Filippo Brunelleschi and the Development of the Florentine Renaissance Altarpiece

Brunelleschi's classically-inspired architecture defined the unified all'antica panel structure and its framework. The architect's fundamental invention, his supervisory role and participation in the innovative altarpiece design are examined. I trace the gradual growth in scholarly understanding of the formal and material development of the classicising architectural frame in the early Quattrocento, and its important role in the development of Early Renaissance painting in Florence.

Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* in San Lorenzo at Florence was designed in the late 1430s, and probably executed shortly thereafter¹ (fig. 1). The unified rectangular panel together with its frame were agreed upon and defined by a collaboration of the patrons, architect, painter and woodworker, that is by the Chapter of San Lorenzo together with the Martelli family, Filippo Brunelleschi, Filippo Lippi, and an anonymous but accomplished Florentine *legnaiuolo*. A few years earlier, in 1434, a decree issued under Brunelleschi's guidance by the canons of San Lorenzo demonstrated his decisive role in planning the enlarged church and its chapels, altars and altarpieces². The recent, highly successful restoration of Lippi's Martelli *Annunciation*, complemented by careful condition reports on the painting and its framework, in conjunction with an extensive historical investigation of its patronage, provides the ideal opportunity for a reassessment of the Brunelleschian *tavola all'antica*. I shall therefore examine formal and material aspects of its frame which must be judged together with the panel-support within its original church setting: no Quattrocento picture could rest on an altar or hang on a wall without a frame, which in addition crucially mediated between church interior and exterior, and between the picture and its viewer. Furthermore, by systematically reviewing recent discussions, the slowly developing recognition of the fundamental importance of the Early Renaissance (framed) altarpiece and Brunelleschi's pioneering achievement will become more apparent.

The wooden frame of Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* is indubitably original save for its architrave (or *cappellone*), which was entirely remade in 1785, and some subsequent minor changes in the *predella* caused by the introduction of protective glass³. My reassessment is based on the style of the major carved components, especially the Corinthian capitals and fluted pilasters, and the carpentry technique. The whitish paint of the lateral pilasters with their gilt detailing was totally renewed in 1864⁴. The gilding of the existing frame had been

restored with bronze-dust and yellow paint in 1844 to recreate the impression of weathered gold. Twenty years later this was judged to be unsatisfactory, probably because of the mottled effect it had produced, and the Quattrocento frame was completely stripped, prepared, gilded and given several layers of white, buffed to resemble porcelain⁵. This radical treatment poses the question: did the second restorer materially renew the frame's earlier polychromy, inadequately retouched by the previous restorer, or did he invent the present appearance of the frame?

Was Filippo's *Annunciation* originally surrounded by a classical "aedicula" frame composed of *predella*, lateral pilasters and entablature, executed in fictive marble with gold detailing⁶? What is the surviving material or textual evidence for marbled frames in the mid-Quattrocento? These important questions become all the more urgent given the general lack of information and incalculable losses. The early marbled frame has been almost totally overlooked by Quattrocento scholars. The classicizing Early Renaissance frame has indeed proved exceptionally vulnerable. In fundamental contrast to the organic gothic polyptych, the unified pictorial support and its frame were produced independently and mounted together only after the painting's completion. Subsequent changes, in religious cult, artistic fashion, natural deterioration and scholarly ignorance decisively reduced the chances of the Quattrocento frame's survival.

Luca della Robbia created the tabernacle of the Holy Sacrament for the Saint Luke chapel at Sant'Egidio in Florence in 1441-1443⁷. Several blocks of white marble from Carrara were delivered by the Opera del Duomo to the sculptor, who carved the Corinthian pilasters which frame the standing angels, the central bronze door, its surmounting plaque and the *Pietà*. Strikingly, the Della Robbia workshop subsequently produced numerous tabernacles and altarpieces made entirely of enamelled terracotta, with the evident intention of imitating marble⁸. Their material integrity unequivocally establishes the marble or marbled frame as an important original component of Early Renaissance images. In 1461 Desiderio da Settignano created a marble Sacrament altarpiece for the Medici transept chapel at San Lorenzo in Florence, and in 1464 Dietisalvi Nerone commissioned another «tavola d'altare» of «pietra bianca» (marble), from Mino da Fiesole for his chapel in the opposite transept⁹. Nerone's commission still survives in the Florentine Badia, where it was subsequently transferred. Preferring to avoid the conjunction of different materials, Florentine craftsmen, it seems, rarely used stone to frame panel paintings until the end of the Quattrocento, and therefore introduced instead a painted substitute.

Already around 1426 Masaccio, probably under Brunelleschi's guidance, frescoed prominent pilasters of white Carrara marble with red granite or porphyry (?) capitals and bases to frame his Trinity altar at Santa Maria Novella¹⁰. The steadily growing

popularity of fictive marble frames can be firmly documented in the *Ricordanze* of Neri di Bicci. In 1459 this Florentine artisan-painter listed a «cholmo [or Madonna tabernacle] *all'antica*» (my emphasis) with its frame painted in «biacha brunita»¹¹. In the same year he delivered to the Augustinian nuns at Prato a «tavola quadra, al'anticha, cholonne a chanali, predella da pie'e di sopra architrave, fregio, chornicione [...] biancho brunito ch' apaià marmo»¹². More importantly, Neri characterized the new frame-type surrounding his images as *all'antica*, carefully identifying its main components – which he, like many contemporaries, obviously believed to be of ancient origin. Yet Filippo Brunelleschi had chosen his models from both Roman and Tuscan prototypes, or better, local “Proto-Renaissance” examples¹³. Obviously, any artist visiting Rome could have studied the Pantheon (figs. 2, 3). Nonetheless, foremost among Brunelleschi’s sources was the Florentine Baptistery, which was then regarded as a genuine antique building. Indicatively, the term *all'antica* had already been used to describe the doors and windows at Brunelleschi’s Ospedale degli Innocenti¹⁴.

Surviving painted marbled frames are rare. Neri di Bicci’s workshop presumably provided the polychromy for the Madonna tabernacle, executed in plaster after Desiderio da Settignano’s model, and possibly prepared by Giuliano da Maiano, which is now in Berlin (fig. 4). Collaboration between their workshops is well attested¹⁵. More importantly still, Benozzo Gozzoli’s 1466 altarpiece from the parish church of Sant’Andrea outside San Gimignano exceptionally survives in its original frame (fig. 5)¹⁶. However, those artists not at the forefront were most unlikely to have invented either the classical “aedicula” frame or the marble pilaster «*all'anticha*», which Neri di Bicci assumes to be common by the 1450s. The question therefore arises, where – and for whom – were the earliest examples created? After the completion of his fresco cycle in the Medici palace chapel Gozzoli was thoroughly familiar with Filippo Lippi’s altarpiece, which formed the commission’s centrepiece, and promptly exported its innovative scheme into the Florentine provinces. Tellingly, it was a drawing book associated with Gozzoli’s workshop, the earliest such compilation, it seems, to survive, which featured architectural details of ancient Roman buildings, notable among them the Pantheon (fig. 6)¹⁷. Benozzo and his assistants thus provide firm graphic and material evidence for a growing awareness of classical architectural forms.

By spring 1459 Lippi’s *Adoration of the Christ Child with Saints* was erected on altar of the Medici palace chapel¹⁸. The 1492 palace inventory described this altarpiece and its framework in considerable detail:

una tavola in sudetto altare di legname chon cholone dallato a chanali dipinte a marmo biancho e chapitelli messi d'oro, e cornicie, e architrave messo d'oro, chon un fregio in is musso (?) messo

d'oro dipintovi cherubini, et in detta tavola una nostra Donna, che adora il figliuolo che sta innanzi a piedi e un San Giovanni e uno Santo Bernardo e Dio Padre colla cholomba innanzi [...]»¹⁹.

Filippo's wooden panel was unquestionably framed by fictive fluted marble pilasters with gilded capitals, which are faithfully reflected in Gozzoli's *Sant'Andrea Pala*. Nowadays a copy of the *Adoration* by Lippi's workshop set within a modern frame provides an impression of the palace chapel's original appearance. Both the form and meaning of Lippi's altarpiece can plausibly be explained by the chapel's assertive patron, the overall programme and its leading executants. Michelozzo, a close collaborator and follower of Brunelleschi, had built the palace chapel. Marble, highly esteemed for its material prestige as well as its durability and imperial connotations, must especially have appealed to the Medici. They had already selected precious marbles for Giovanni di Bicci's table tomb in the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo. In their palace chapel no cost was spared, and various marbles were chosen for the *opus sectile* pavement, the strigillated altar-frontal and the altar *mensa*. Fictive marble framed Gozzoli's frescoes just as fictive pilasters framed Lippi's panel. What other prototypes for the marble pilaster existed before 1456-1457, when the Medici presumably commissioned Fra Filippo's *Adoration*?

It is currently a well-nigh impossible task to survey the many small and medium-sized Madonna tabernacles emanating from the workshops of Ghiberti, Donatello and Luca della Robbia. Some patently reflected the spread of fashionable marble frames, both real and fictive. Neri di Bicci recorded one such painted *cholmo* and another still survives in Berlin (see fig. 4)²⁰. A pristine example forms the magnificent frontispiece of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, completed between 1475 and 1478 (fig. 7)²¹. What should be stressed unequivocally is the path-breaking role of Filippo Brunelleschi, who created the new architectural style inspired by antiquity. In 1971 Howard Burns, in a magisterial essay, articulated the myriad methodological problems concerning any investigation of Quattrocento architecture, which self-evidently includes frames, and its relationship to the antique²². Brunelleschi befriended patrons, artists and artisans and deeply influenced their diverse and innovative projects, which included, among others, Donatello's marble niche of Saint Louis of Toulouse for the Parte Guelfa, Masaccio's frescoed Trinity altar for Berto di Bartolomeo, the master builder, in Santa Maria Novella, Luca della Robbia's Holy Sacrament tabernacle in Sant'Egidio and Filippo Lippi's Martelli altarpiece for the Cappella degli Operai in San Lorenzo (fig. 8; see fig. 1)²³. These prime examples were all prominently located in Florence. Not accidentally most patrons placed their identifying coat of arms, painted or carved, on the altarpiece frame.

Had Brunelleschi proposed marbled pilasters with gilded capitals as the framing device in San Lorenzo, he could have been stimulated by classical Roman architecture, which often differentiated materially as well as chromatically between column-shafts and their capitals and bases²⁴. In contrast to the metalwork-inspired gilded frame-architecture of the gothic polyptych, Brunelleschi could well have associated marble-framed altar images with stone door and window frames. Such apertures convincingly accommodated Alberti's essential concept of the Renaissance painting to be understood as a window opening²⁵. Marble, furthermore, resonated socially, politically, economically and ideologically in Quattrocento Florence.

Any investigation of the marbled pilaster as part of a classical "*aedicula*" frame should not however overlook one remarkable apparent contradiction. Although the fictive marble frame imitates a precious and highly prestigious material, white-painted wood was, by comparison, much cheaper and easier to handle. Revealingly, before the introduction of fictive marble, for certain ordinary commissions Neri di Bicci used *argento dorato*, silver-gilt instead of *oro fine*, pure gold²⁶. Following long-established practice, he thus saved on material costs. Others introduced fictive Cosmati work, imitating Roman mediaeval mosaic, like Giovanni del Biondo in his Rinuccini polyptych at Santa Croce (fig. 9), or even marbled *predella* ends, as did Giotto in his Bolognese polyptych²⁷. Neri and other painters would continue this parsimony, and certainly by the mid-Quattrocento the della Robbia produced enamelled terracotta, which with a cheaper material skilfully imitated precious marble frames surrounding colourful images²⁸. As Alberti stated, echoing Ovid, craftsmanship and artistry were more valuable than costly materials²⁹.

While the original location of Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* in San Lorenzo was recently discussed in a splendidly produced book, full visual documentation *after* restoration of the framed panel *in situ* was, quite astonishingly, omitted, and the only altarpiece from Brunelleschi's time still surviving in its original architectonic setting was, characteristically, neglected (see fig. 8, before restoration)³⁰. Unsurprisingly, a comparable oversight had earlier occurred when Filippino Lippi's restored Nerli *pala* was returned to Santo Spirito (fig. 10)³¹. The crucial importance of the Brunelleschian setting as a precondition for the creation of the Early Renaissance altarpiece has, all too often, been flagrantly overlooked. The introduction of the Corinthian fluted pilaster with its appropriate capital and base, which with the *predella*-socle and crowning architrave forms part of the painting's classical "*aedicula*" frame, cannot be fully grasped without proper understanding the architect's fundamental *Gesamtkonzept* of the church (see figs. 1, 8). Significantly a specific nomenclature for Brunelleschi's new creation, first characterized

by omission as «*tabula quadrata et sine civoriis*», the unified rectangular panel *without* finials and crockets, had not yet been coined in 1434. Shortly afterwards in his *Della Pittura*, dated 1436, Alberti described the new altarpiece-frame still somewhat hesitantly as «*li altri fabrili hornamenti giunti alla pictura qual sono colupne scolpite, base, capitelli et frontispicii [...]*»³². Some two decades later Neri di Bicci succinctly characterized the «*tavola quadra all'antica*». Ideally this framed panel would be neatly integrated into the elevation of the chapel, and its frame-architecture would satisfyingly reiterate that of the built architecture. Micro-architecture here followed macro-architecture. Furthermore, the framed paintings would be erected on the altars in front of plain white walls in well-lit chapels³³. The altarpieces would thus have presented an iconographical, or rather religious focus for worshippers undistracted by surrounding imagery.

To what degree could Brunelleschi's spatial organization have been inspired by ancient picture-settings which he likely studied in Rome³⁴? To what extent did his concern with central perspective impact his chapel organization? Did Alberti's "window" concept react to Brunelleschi's ideas or vice versa? My comprehensive examination of all the altarpieces in the enlarged San Lorenzo clearly demonstrated that Brunelleschi, the architect-impresario *par excellence*, was ultimately unable fully to realize his grand vision³⁵. This finding renders his carefully planned and largely extant setting of Filippo Lippi's Martelli *Annunciation* in the Cappella degli Operai even more important. Brunelleschi's *all'antica*-inspired architecture defined the *tabula* or *tavola*, that is, its unified *all'antica* panel-structure and framework. Its "*aedicula*" frame is ultimately of classical Roman origin.

Earlier artists, such as Orcagna or Lorenzo Ghiberti, who, like Brunelleschi, simultaneously practiced several professions as architects, sculptors, woodworkers, goldsmiths and painters, were readily qualified to grasp and exploit the challenges of the framed altar-panel in a unified architectonic setting. Documentation for Florentine architects conceiving architectural frames for Renaissance altarpieces in the period following Brunelleschi's death in 1446 is extremely thin. Michelozzo, when building the chapel of the Novitiates in Santa Croce, could perhaps have supervised the lost frame-architecture of Filippo Lippi's *pala*³⁶. Michelozzo, who had enlarged the east end of San Marco, might equally have influenced the architectonic frame of Fra Angelico's high altarpiece³⁷. In the 1460s Giuliano da Maiano, who repeatedly collaborated with Neri di Bicci, also produced the woodwork for the altarpiece painted by the Pollaiuolo brothers for the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato – presumably in agreement with the chapel's architect, Antonio di Manetti Ciaccheri³⁸.

A drawing of uncertain provenance attributed to Filippino Lippi in the Uffizi shows the *Volto Santo of Lucca with Angels and Saints* within a rather plain, architectonic frame (fig. 11)³⁹. The altarpiece's austere fluted pilasters, in the Brunelleschian tradition, may be compared to those of the earliest *pala* erected in the rebuilt Santo Spirito, such as Cosimo Rosselli's Corbinelli *pala* which is dated 1482 (fig. 12), or Francesco Botticini's contemporary *pala* of the Mantellate⁴⁰. In all three cases, frame and panel structure were probably prescribed by the patron and/or the religious institution responsible for the paintings' final locations. Another drawing tentatively attributed to the young Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane contains two incomplete, monumental, arched frames, probably for an *Assumption* or *Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 13)⁴¹. The freely added foliate decor on their outer arches, which Neri di Bicci simply called *foglia* in his ledger, supports the crowning acanthus leaves which have recently been reconstructed above Filippino's Nerli *pala* in Santo Spirito⁴². This superb altarpiece from the later 1480s clearly belongs to a second phase of architectural frame design. The ever-extending *all'antica* decor was now more accurately informed by archaeological study of classical visual prototypes, and also by wider familiarity with ancient literary sources.

The frame-architecture attributed to Giuliano da Sangallo for Domenico Ghirlandaio's Sassetti altarpiece of 1485 in Santa Trinita presents another striking example (fig. 14)⁴³. Its frieze carries an inscription in Roman capitals, which Ghirlandaio echoed in the triumphal arch in the painting's background⁴⁴. While the setting of Filippino's Nerli *pala* adhered to the Brunelleschian architectural scheme (see fig. 10), Ghirlandaio's *pala* was seamlessly integrated into an overarching fresco cycle, which clothed the entire gothic structure of the family burial chapel. At the end of the century it was Giuliano da Sangallo in Santa Maria delle Carceri at Prato, who, as responsible architect, designed the high altar ensemble (fig. 15)⁴⁵. Giuliano's imposing *cappella*, now executed in marble instead of wood, presented a seminal model for future developments stretching into the Baroque.

The *legnaiuolo* of Lippi's *Annunciation*, like Filippino's, remains stubbornly anonymous⁴⁶. A *legnaiuolo* would only exceptionally sign his work, as did Simone Cini together with the painter Spinello Aretino and the gilder Gabriele in the inscription socle of the elaborate polyptych of 1384-1385 destined for Santa Maria Nuova in Rome⁴⁷. Occasionally a woodworker left his name on the reverse of an altar-panel⁴⁸. Almost unnoticed in Tuscany remains a different kind of craft signature, the brandmark, again applied to the back of painted and sculpted altarpieces. One such brand has been identified on the *Adoration of the Christ Child by the Magi*, attributed to Botticelli, in the National Gallery in

London⁴⁹. Another survives on Nofero di Antonio Noferi's monumental wooden framework for the altar sculptures of the Bigallo (fig. 16), paid for by the Florentine confraternity in 1515⁵⁰. Further woodworker marks on paintings by Leonardo da Vinci and Rosso Fiorentino have been observed. What functions did landmarks play in early Cinquecento Italy? In Brussels and Antwerp, they mainly served as quality controls of material and craftsmanship for the local guilds⁵¹. Separate contracts, payments, drawings, models and literary comments increasingly establish the important contributions of individual *legnaiuoli*, of carpenters among sculptors, and their *opera*.

Since Creighton Gilbert's groundbreaking 1977 discussion of the role of the woodworker and his collaboration with painters at the beginning of the Renaissance, general awareness of the many problems of designing and making an altarpiece has greatly increased⁵². Yet Gilbert utterly neglected the altarpiece's setting – and thus missed Brunelleschi's fundamental invention, the continuous general, supervisory role of the architect, and his specific participation in the altarpiece design. Contemporaneously, the present author discussed wooden panel-structures and local workshop procedures, identifying the previously overlooked buttressed altarpiece, a freestanding, monumental wooden structure supported by substantial lateral pilasters flanking the altar-block and anchored to the altar-podium⁵³. This solution has now been generally accepted. Already in 1979 and 1982, I decisively linked the *pala quadrata all'antica* with Brunelleschi and subsequently considered the architectural settings of Raphael's Roman altarpieces⁵⁴. Barbara Markowsky had first systematically investigated painted altar-frontals (*paliotti*) in order to establish altar location, dedication and patronage in Santo Spirito at Florence⁵⁵. Victor Schmidt, on the other hand, almost ahistorically excluded any altarpiece from Brunelleschi's original church designs⁵⁶. In 1989 the National Gallery in London produced a pioneering publication, *Art in the Making*, in which the Early Italian paintings in their collection were comprehensively examined and discussed, an exemplary initiative promptly followed by other leading institutions⁵⁷.

Twenty years after Gilbert's publication, Caroline Elam deftly summarized the advances of research on frames in an illuminating editorial in «The Burlington Magazine»⁵⁸. She strongly accentuated the responsibility of woodworker-architects as producers of frames and urged scholars to understand the architecture, sculpture and painting of framed altarpieces inclusively. In 2001 Christoph Merzenich, a trained restorer and art historian, published *Vom Schreinerwerk zum Gemälde*; regrettably, the very rich material remains almost impenetrable due to its lack of a proper index⁵⁹. He argued that the *tavola*

quadrata all'antica could not have been introduced by Brunelleschi and thus be dated before the second half of the fifteenth century. He further asserted, once again wrongly in my view, that iconography – rather than a classically-inspired architectural concept – initiated the Renaissance altarpiece. In 2005 Michelle O'Malley eclectically assessed contracts and the commissioning process, without however sufficiently distinguishing between the two basic constitutive components of a Renaissance *tavola*: the pictorial support and its surrounding frame⁶⁰. *Ornamento* is a commonly used, generic term for frame, but was it really employed for the architectonic frame in the fifteenth century? Increasingly, contract drawings, or even three-dimensional *modelli*, replaced detailed frame descriptions. Giuliano da Sangallo was thus commissioned to produce a «disegno», that is a wooden *modello*, of the high altar ensemble for his church commission at Prato⁶¹. Andrea De Marchi astutely summarised current research in his Florentine university lectures, but his 2012 book, *La pala d'altare dal polittico alla pala quadra*, contained neither professional acknowledgements nor footnotes⁶². In 2016 the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence published an instructive collection of essays on *Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings* which valuably extends the visual and material evidence for wooden altarpiece construction⁶³.

Nowadays the researcher has become acutely conscious of the need to better understand materials and techniques (including tools) for any reconstruction or assessment of a framed altarpiece. How, for example, was the natural movement of a large and very heavy wooden support controlled? How were pilasters, entablature and *predella* physically integrated? And finally, how were these large composite structures kept upright on their altars? Publications prompted by recent in-house restorations were pioneered by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence⁶⁴. They provide crucial access to information which in the past was not readily available, or was regarded as superfluous. A recent, comprehensive collaboration between restorers, scientists and art historians enabled the thorough investigation, reconstruction and publication of a single preeminent altarpiece, Sassetta's double-sided polyptych from Borgo Sansepulcro⁶⁵. In another noteworthy book, the techniques of all the panel paintings by Masolino and Masaccio were re-assessed⁶⁶.

Indicatively the Florentine *tavola all'antica* has never been the topic of an independent exhibition, and most exhibitions, especially monographic ones, are driven, somewhat unreflectively, by anniversaries of individual artists, works of art or memorable historical events, rather than by new research or an overarching intellectual concept. Yet, that the latter can be successfully accom-

plished was triumphantly demonstrated by the London exhibition *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, which organically included framed images in secular contexts, and by the great exhibition at Cambridge on colour in manuscripts in 2016⁶⁷. In most museums velvet or other inappropriate modern materials have now been removed from fragmented paintings, often unveiling their bare wood. Historical fragmentation has finally been accepted in the public sphere. Yet many museum labels still remain woefully inadequate, omitting basic information: is the frame original, contemporary, a later addition or simply a modern creation? Furthermore, it would be most helpful if exhibitions would provide, where possible, maximum visibility of the front and back of the works, especially of large altarpieces, in order to facilitate informed study. Digital reconstructions could help to reimagine altarpieces in their original settings⁶⁸.

More focused research and more comprehensive restoration reports have helped present-day scholars to better understand the formal and material development of the Quattrocento classicizing architectural frame, and its central role in the development of Early Renaissance painting in Florence. It is fervently hoped that further insights in both areas will enable scholars to fundamentally reconceptualize Brunelleschi's architectural revolution and the importance, within that paradigm shift, of the Early Renaissance frame.

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- 1 See most recently *Intorno all'Annunciazione Martelli di Filippo Lippi*, ed. by M. Bietti, Firenze, 2018, with full bibliography.
- 2 The 1434 decree was published by J. Ruda, *A 1434 building programme for San Lorenzo in Florence*, in «The Burlington Magazine», 120, 1978, pp. 358-361, extensively discussed by C. Gardner von Teuffel, *The altarpieces of San Lorenzo. Memorializing the martyr or accommodating the parishioners*, in *San Lorenzo: A Florentine Church*, ed. by R.W. Gaston, L.A. Waldman, Firenze, 2017, pp. 184-243, and further examined by ead., *Brunelleschi impresario: cappelle nuove e pale nuove a San Lorenzo a Firenze*, in *Intorno all'Annunciazione*, cit., pp. 182-195.
- 3 For the *cappellone*, see M. Bietti, *Regesto e documenti sui restauri antichi dell'Annunciazione e della sua cornice*, in *Intorno alla Annunciazione*, cit., pp. 88-91, esp. p. 88; R. Buda, *Il supporto ligneo dell'Annunciazione di Filippo Lippi e la sua cornice*, in *ivi*, pp. 124-133, esp. p. 131.
- 4 Bietti, *Regesto e documenti sui restauri*, cit., p. 88: «ritoccato con polvere di bronzo una cornice per un altare e brunita a guisa d'oratura vecchia, e più dato di giallo colore d'oro alle facie esterne [...]». Further C. Gardner von Teuffel, C. Castelli, *La tavola dell'Annunciazione Martelli nella basilica di San Lorenzo a Firenze, con un studio tecnico sulle modalità costruttive del supporto*, in «OPD Restauro. Rivista dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure e Laboratori di Restauro di Firenze», 26, 2014, pp. 35-52, esp. p. 36, written before the last restoration.

- 5 Bietti, *Regesto e documenti sui restauri*, cit., p. 88: «per aver raschiata tutta la Cornice di un quadro antico [...] ammannita, dorata, dato più mani di biacca, brunita e fatta a guise di porcellana».
- 6 I have deliberately employed the term “*aedicula*” frame throughout this study; the widespread modern usage of the “tabernacle” frame misleadingly equates liturgical terminology with formal description. For an important discussion of the Eucharistic tabernacle, see L.E. Boyle, *An ambry of 1299 at San Clemente*, in L.E. Boyle, O.P., E.M. Kane, F. Guidobaldi, *San Clemente Miscellany II*, ed. by L. Dempsey, O.P., Roma, 1978, pp. 36-59.
- 7 J. Pope-Hennessy, *Luca della Robbia*, Oxford, 1980, pp. 234-235; updated by G. Gentilini, *I Della Robbia: la scultura invetriata nel Rinascimento*, Firenze, 1992, vol. 1, p. 49; A. Padoa Rizzo, *Luca della Robbia e Verrocchio. Un nuovo documento e una nuova interpretazione iconografica del tabernacolo di Peretola*, in «Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz», 1, 1994, pp. 48-68; and F. Caglioti, *Andrea del Verrocchio, Colomba dello Spirito Santo*, in *Verrocchio, il Maestro di Leonardo*, exh. cat., Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi 2019, ed. by F. Caglioti, A. De Marchi, Firenze, 2019, pp. 232-233.
- 8 See, for example, the *tempietti* at Impruneta or the Sassetti *pala* from the Badia Fiesolana in Gentilini, *I Della Robbia*, cit., pp. 131, 170.
- 9 Gardner von Teuffel, *The altarpieces of San Lorenzo*, cit., p. 192; for the documented materials, alabaster and marble, see S.E. Zuraw, *The Sculpture of Mino da Fiesole (1429-1484)*, Ph.D. Diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1993, pp. 259-266, 767-768.
- 10 A. Cecchi, *Nuovi contributi alla committenza fiorentina di Masolino e Masaccio*, in A. Baldinotti, A. Cecchi, V. Farinella, L. Pisani, *Masaccio e Masolino: il gioco delle parti*, Milano, 2002, pp. 23-71, esp. pp. 32-57.
- 11 Neri di Bicci, *Le Ricordanze (10 marzo 1453-24 aprile 1475)*, ed. by B. Santi, Pisa, 1976, pp. 111-112.
- 12 *Ivi*, p. 119.
- 13 Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, ed. by H. Saalman, University Park, Pa.-London, 1970, pp. 51-55; and fundamentally, H. Burns, *Quattrocento architecture and the antique: some problems*, in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 500-1500. Proceedings of an international conference held at King's College, Cambridge, April 1969*, ed. by R.R. Bolgar, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 269-287, esp. p. 271.
- 14 M.C. Mendes Atanásio, G. Dallai, *Nuove indagini sullo spedale degli Innocenti a Firenze*, in «Commentari», 17, 1966, pp. 83-106, esp. p. 101. For further comment, see U. Pfisterer, *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile 1430-1445*, München, 2002, pp. 85-86.
- 15 R.G. Kecks, *Madonna und Kind: Das häusliche Andachtsbild im Florenz des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1988, p. 143, fig. 106b; B. Santi, *Giuliano da Maiano e Neri di Bicci: Due botteghe quattrocentesche in collaborazione*, in *Giuliano e la bottega dei da Maiano*, ed. by D. Lamberini, M. Lotti, R. Lunardi, Firenze, 1994, pp. 143-147.
- 16 D.C. Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli*, New Haven-London, 1996, pp. 255-256; C. Merzenich, *Vom Schreinerwerk zum Gemälde: Florentiner Altarwerke der ersten Hälfte des Quattrocento. Eine Untersuchung zu Konstruktion, Material und Rahmenform*, Berlin, 2001, fig. 156; A. De Marchi, *La pala d'altare: Dal Polittico alla pala quadra, dispense del corso tenuto a.a. 2011-2012*, Firenze, 2012, p. 85, without comment on the marbled pilasters; see instead G. de Simone, *Benozzo Gozzoli, Pala di Sant'Andrea*, in *Benozzo Gozzoli a San Gimignano*, exh. cat., San Gimignano, Pinacoteca Civica 2016, ed. by G. de Simone, C. Borgioli, Firenze, 2016, pp. 42-44.

- The complete entablature may well reflect the lost ones of Lippi's Medici *tavola* and perhaps even of his San Lorenzo *Annunciation*. Another Gozzoli *pala* from San Lazzaro fuori le mura at Pisa also possesses a marbled frame, for which see Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli*, cit., pp. 188, 246.
- 17 A. Nesselrath, *Der Zeichner und sein Buch. Die Darstellung der antiken Architektur im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Mainz, 2014, p. 69, with reference to B. Degenhart, A. Schmitt, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen 1300-1450*, Berlin, 1968, vol. 1.2, pp. 478-481; 1.4, plates 327-338.
 - 18 C. Acidini Luchinat, *Benozzo Gozzoli. La Cappella dei Magi*, Milano, 1993, pp. 7-24; B. Paolozzi Strozzi, *L'Adorazione del Bambino della bottega di Filippo Lippi*, in Acidini Luchinat, *Benozzo Gozzoli*, cit., pp. 29-32; Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli*, cit., pp. 81-119, both with rich bibliography. As Lippi's *Adoration* was removed from its altar in 1814, if not by 1837, its frame cannot have served as a direct model for the 1864 restoration of the *Annunciation* frame, unless we assume – in my view wrongly – that the *Annunciation* frame was only executed in the 1460s, when the altarpiece could be erected in the completed chapel.
 - 19 See E. Müntz, *Les collections des Médicis au XVe siècle*, Paris, 1888, p. 12; *Libro d'inventario dei Beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. by M. Spallanzani, G. Gaeta Bertelà, Firenze, 1992, p. 23, with slight alterations.
 - 20 See above notes 11 and 15 for the Berlin tabernacle.
 - 21 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat. 4802, made for Alfonso, Duke of Calabria. See N. Gray, *A History of Lettering: Creative Experiment and Letter Identity*, Oxford, 1986, p. 130, attributed the illumination to Piero del Massaio, while recently F.W. Kent, C. Elam, *Piero del Massaio, painter, mapmaker and military surveyor*, in «Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz», 1, 2015, pp. 64-89, esp. pp. 66, 89, argued in favour of Francesco Rosselli.
 - 22 See Burns, *Quattrocento architecture*, cit.; R. Jones, *Mantegna and materials*, in «I Tatti Studies», 2, 1987, pp. 71-90, focused on marble in painting and architecture of the later Quattrocento, but not frames.
 - 23 D. Finiello Zervas, *The Parte Guelfa, Brunelleschi & Donatello*, New York, 1987; Cecchi, *Nuovi contributi*, cit.; and for Luca's tabernacle, see above note 7.
 - 24 C. Smith, *Leon Battista Alberti e l'ornamento: i rivestimenti parietali e pavimentazioni*, in *Leon Battista Alberti*, ed. by J. Rykwert, A. Engel, Milano, 1994, pp. 196-215, esp. pp. 208-211; further P. Pensabene, *I Marmi nella Roma antica*, Roma, 2013, p. 22.
 - 25 L.B. Alberti, *Della Pittura*, ed. by L. Mallé, Firenze, 1950, p. 70.
 - 26 Neri di Bicci, *Ricordanze*, cit., pp. 12, 15, 40, 56.
 - 27 For cost saving, see C. Gardner von Teuffel, *The buttressed altarpiece: A forgotten aspect of Tuscan fourteenth-century altarpiece design*, in «Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen», 21, 1979, pp. 21-65, esp. p. 30 (reprinted and annotated in *ead.*, *From Duccio's Maestà to Raphael's Transfiguration: Italian altarpieces and their settings*, London, 2005, pp. 119-182, esp. p. 123); for Giovanni del Biondo's buttresses, see *ead.*, *The buttressed altarpiece*, cit., pp. 21-24 (reprinted and annotated in *ead.*, *From Duccio's Maestà*, cit., pp. 119-120); and for Giotto's *predella*, see M. Cämmerer-George, *Die Rahmung der toskanischen Altarbilder im Trecento*, Strasbourg, 1966, p. 93.
 - 28 For Andrea della Robbia's Sassetti *pala*, see above note 8; more recently *I Della Robbia e l'arte nuova della scultura invetriata*, exh. cat., Fiesole, Basilica di Sant' Alessandro 1998, ed. by G. Gentilini, Fiesole, 1998, pp. 172-173.

- 29 Alberti, *Della Pittura*, cit., p. 102; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by F.J. Miller, rev. by G.P. Goold, Cambridge, Mass.-London, 1999, vol. II, pp. 60-61.
- 30 Gardner von Teuffel, *Brunelleschi impresario*, cit., fig. 1, p. 182.
- 31 *La Pala Nerli di Filippino Lippi in Santo Spirito*, ed. by D. Rapino, Firenze, 2013, fig. 1. To my knowledge no professional photograph of the restored panel returned to its original location exists. A partial explanation for this persistent neglect may well lie in the current system of tendering for restoration projects, where a necessarily new photograph of the completed work back *in situ* is routinely omitted in order to contain costs.
- 32 Alberti, *Della Pittura*, cit., p. 102.
- 33 See above note 2; frescoes and walled tombs were not permitted.
- 34 In a most suggestive way, E. Winsor Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 132-155, analyses archaeological, visual as well as literary and social aspects; more recently, *I colori del Palatino: la pittura romana nel cuore dell'impero*, ed. by A. D'Alessio, Roma, 2018, reproduces a variety of *aediculae* in their original settings: pp. 57, 60, 63, 64, 73, 86, 90, 105. For a discussion of *aediculae* dominating the wall scheme, see further J.R. Clarke, *The House of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford 1991, pp. 50-54. As so little is known about Brunelleschi's time in Rome – all his drawings are lost – we can only guess that he saw comparable examples.
- 35 Gardner von Teuffel, *Brunelleschi impresario*, cit., pp. 189-191.
- 36 Apparently, no document for the frame exists. For the painting, see A. Dori, L. Dori, *La Pala Medici per il Noviziato di Santa Croce*, in *Officina Pratese: Tecnica, Stile, Storia*, ed. by P. Benassai et al., Firenze, 2014, pp. 137-148; for the chapel M. Ferrara, F. Quinterio, *Michelozzo di Bartolomeo*, Firenze, 1984, pp. 201-202.
- 37 See most recently, A. Kranz, *Fra Angelico*, in *Florenz und seine Maler. Von Giotto bis Leonardo da Vinci*, exh. cat., München, Alte Pinakothek 2018-2019, ed. by A. Schumacher, München, 2018, pp. 204-211 (English ed., 2018), largely based on *L'Angelico Ritrovato. Studi e ricerche per la Pala di San Marco*, exh. cat., Firenze, Museo di San Marco 2008-2009, ed. by C. Acidini Luchinat, M. Scudieri, Firenze, 2008. I have deliberately excluded Angelico's Cortona *Annunciation* from the present assessment, because the condition of its frame is uncertain, and the *supercoelum*, the projecting upper frame part, still belongs to a transitional stage; furthermore, this altarpiece was set against an existing screen at San Domenico.
- 38 A. Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, New Haven-London, 2005, pp. 191-208, with older bibliography.
- 39 A. Cecchi, *The Volto Santo of Lucca Supported by Two Angels, with Saint John the Baptist and Saint Mark?, within a Frame*, in *The Drawings of Filippino Lippi and His Circle*, exh. cat., New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1997-1998, ed. by G.R. Goldner, C.C. Bambach, New York, 1997, pp. 244-245, cat. 69.
- 40 A.C. Blume, *The chapel of Santa Monica in Santo Spirito and Francesco Botticini*, in «Arte Cristiana», 83, 1995, pp. 289-292; E. Capretti, *La Pinacoteca Sacra*, in *La Chiesa e Il Convento di Santo Spirito a Firenze*, ed. by C. Acidini Luchinat, E. Capretti, Firenze, 1996, pp. 239-308, esp. pp. 242-243.
- 41 N. Ferri, *Indice geografico-analitico dei disegni di architettura civile e militare esistenti nella R. Galleria degli Uffizi in Firenze*, Roma, 1885, no. 4100A, *penna su carta bianca*, 190 x 199 mm. The photograph of this apparently unpublished drawing was given to me by the late Ulrich

Middeldorf, a fervent collector and researcher of frames. Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane started his career as *legnaiuolo* in the shop run by his uncles, Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio, in Florence. See below note 58.

- 42 Neri di Bicci, *Ricordanze*, cit., pp. 12, 56, 131, 304; for Filippino's *acroteria*, see Rapino, *La Pala Nerli*, cit., pp. 28-32. Regrettably the reverse of the altarpiece was not reproduced in Rapino, as it would have shown the specially constructed wooden support for securing and stabilizing the large panel in the deep, curved niche.
- 43 Neither E. Borsook, J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinita, Florence: History and Legend in a Renaissance Chapel*, Doornspijk, 1981, nor J.K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*, New Haven-London, 2000, pp. 84, 253-255, refer to a possible frame maker.
- 44 For Giuliano da Sangallo's lettering style, see D. Covi, *Lettering in fifteenth-century Florentine Painting*, in «The Art Bulletin», 45, 1963, pp. 1-17, esp. pp. 6, 11.
- 45 P. Morselli, G. Corti, *La Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato*, Firenze, 1982, pp. 71-73, 150-153; S. Frommel, *Giuliano da Sangallo*, Firenze, 2014, pp. 325-327, 340; and P. Davies, *Giuliano da Sangallo e decorum negli edifici a pianta centrale: Santa Maria delle Carceri e la sacristia di Santo Spirito*, in *Giuliano da Sangallo*, ed. by A. Belluzzi, C. Elam, F.P. Fiore, Milano, 2017, pp. 304-329, esp. pp. 304-309.
- 46 Cfr. Gardner von Teuffel, Castelli, *La tavola dell'Annunciazione*, cit., p. 41.
- 47 «MAGISTER SIMON CINI DE FLORENTIA INTALAVIT»: see Gilbert, *Peintres et menuisiers*, cit., pp. 10-11; S. Weppelmann, *Spinello Aretino und die toskanische Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Firenze, 2003, pp. 51-54, 145-151.
- 48 P. Paoletti, *Notizie di Venezia*, in «L'Arte», 5, 1902, pp. 125-126.
- 49 *Paintings and Drawings on the Backs of National Gallery Pictures*, ed. by M. Davies, London, 1946, p. viii, only refers to a drawing on the reverse of Botticelli's *Adoration*, NG 592.
- 50 H. Kiel, *Il Museo del Bigallo*, Firenze, 1977, pp. 123-128, published Noferi's commission.
- 51 L.F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550. Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 8-9, 151, 157-159.
- 52 Gilbert, *Peintres e menuisiers*, cit.
- 53 C. Gardner von Teuffel, *Masaccio and the Pisan altarpiece: a new approach*, in «Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen», 19, 1977, pp. 23-68 (reprinted and annotated in *ead.*, *From Duccio's Maestà*, cit., pp. 1-71, 615-619); and for the buttressed altarpiece, see above note 27.
- 54 C. Gardner von Teuffel, *From polyptych to pala: some structural considerations*, in *La Pittura nel XIV e XV Secolo. Il contributo dell'analisi tecnica alla storia dell'arte*, conf. proc., Bologna, 1979, vol. 3, ed. by H.W. van Os, J.R.J. van Asperen de Boers, Bologna, 1983, pp. 323-344. Further *ead.*, *Lorenzo Monaco, Filippo Lippi and Filippo Brunelleschi: die Erfindung der Renaissancepala*, in «Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte», 45, 1982, pp. 1-30 (reprinted and annotated in *ead.*, *From Duccio's Maestà*, cit., pp. 211-266, 629-635); *ead.*, *Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung*, in «Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte», 50, 1987, pp. 1-45 (reprinted and annotated in *ead.*, *From Duccio's Maestà*, cit., pp. 271-331, 635-650).
- 55 B. Markowsky, *Eine Gruppe bemalter Paliotti in Florenz und der Toskana und ihre textilen Vorbilder*, in «Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz», 1, 1973, pp. 105-140.
- 56 V.M. Schmidt, *Filippo Brunelleschi e il problema della tavola d'altare*, in «Arte Cristiana», 80, 1992, pp. 451-461.

- 57 D. Bomford *et al.*, *Italian Painting Before 1400: Art in the Making*, exh. cat., London, The National Gallery 1989-1990, London, 1989.
- 58 C. Elam, *Frames*, in «The Burlington Magazine», 139, 1997, p. 83, and expanded in *ead.*, *Giuliano da Sangallo architetto legnaiuolo*, in *Giuliano da Sangallo*, cit., pp. 75-86.
- 59 Merzenich, *Vom Schreinerwerk*, cit.
- 60 M. O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven-London, 2005, pp. 28-36.
- 61 See above note 45. For a fundamental contribution on the model as «built conversation», see A. Lillie, M. Mussolin, *The wooden models of Palazzo Strozzi as flexible instruments in the design process*, in *Giuliano da Sangallo*, cit., pp. 210-228; for earlier practice, see J. Gardner, *Who were the microarchitects?* in *Microarchitectures Médiévales. L'échelle à l'épreuve de la matière*, ed. by J.-M. Guilloùët, A. de Bruyne-Vilain, Paris, 2018, pp. 37-46.
- 62 De Marchi, *La pala d'altare*, cit.
- 63 *Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence: Method, Theory, and Practice*, ed. by M. Ciatti, C. Frosinini, Firenze, 2016.
- 64 For an outstanding example, see *L'officina di Giotto: il restauro della Croce di Ognissanti*, ed. by M. Ciatti, Firenze, 2010.
- 65 *Sassetta: The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece*, ed. by M. Israëls, Firenze-Leiden, 2009.
- 66 C.B. Strehlke, C. Frosinini, *The Panel Paintings of Masolino and Masaccio: The Role of Technique*, Milano, 2002.
- 67 *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, exh. cat., London, Victoria & Albert Museum 2006-2007, London-New York, 2006; *Colour: The Art & Science of Illuminated Manuscripts*, exh. cat., Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum 2016, ed. by S. Panayotova, D. Jackson, P. Ricciardi, London-Turnhout, 2016.
- 68 This needs to be undertaken critically for such reconstructions can be damagingly misleading. For example, the pioneering digital reconstruction of Ugolino di Nerio's Santa Croce polyptych in its setting places it in a chapel with stained glass, which did not exist at that date.



Fig. 1: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Martelli Annunciation*, ca. 1439-1442. Florence, San Lorenzo, Cappella degli Operai. Photo by Antonio Quattrone.



Fig. 2: Fluted Pilasters, Pantheon, narthex, left side. Photo by Author.



Fig. 3: Fluted Pilasters, Pantheon, interior, second right niche. Photo by Author.



Fig. 4: Desiderio da Settignano and Neri di Bicci, *Madonna*, 1459? Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung. Photo by Author.



Fig. 5: Benozzo Gozzoli, *Sant'Andrea Pala*, 1466. San Gimignano, Pinacoteca.
Photo by Antonio Quattrone.

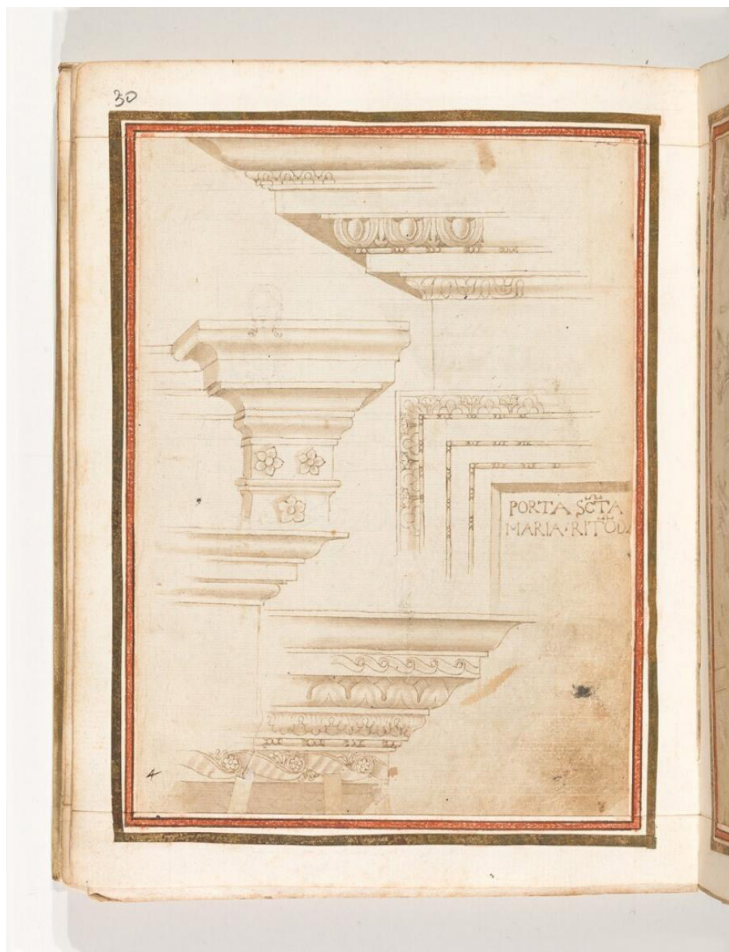


Fig. 6: Benozzo Gozzoli Workshop attr., *Drawings after Roman Architectural Fragments*, 1450-1470. Rotterdam, Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Sketchbook inv. no. 562, f. 4r.
Photo: Rotterdam, Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum.



Fig. 7: Francesco Rosselli attr., *Frontispiece of Ptolemy's Cosmographia*, 1475-1478.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat. 4802, f. 1v.
S.B. Butters, *The Triumph of Vulcan*, Firenze, 1996, vol. II, pl. III.



Fig. 8: Cappella degli Operai (before restoration), San Lorenzo, Florence.
Photo by Nicolò Orsi Battaglini.



Fig. 9: Giovanni del Biondo, *Rinuccini Polyptych*, det. of buttress, 1379.
Florence, Santa Croce. Photo by Julian Gardner.



Fig. 10: Filippino Lippi, *Nerli Virgin with Saints and Donors*, 1480s.
Florence, Santo Spirito. Photo by Gail E. Solberg.



Fig. 11: Filippino Lippi attr., *The Volto Santo of Lucca with Angels and Saints*. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, inv. no. 227E. Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici.



Fig. 12: Cosimo Rosselli, *Corbinelli Virgin with Saints*, 1482. Florence, Santo Spirito.
Photo by Gail E. Solberg.

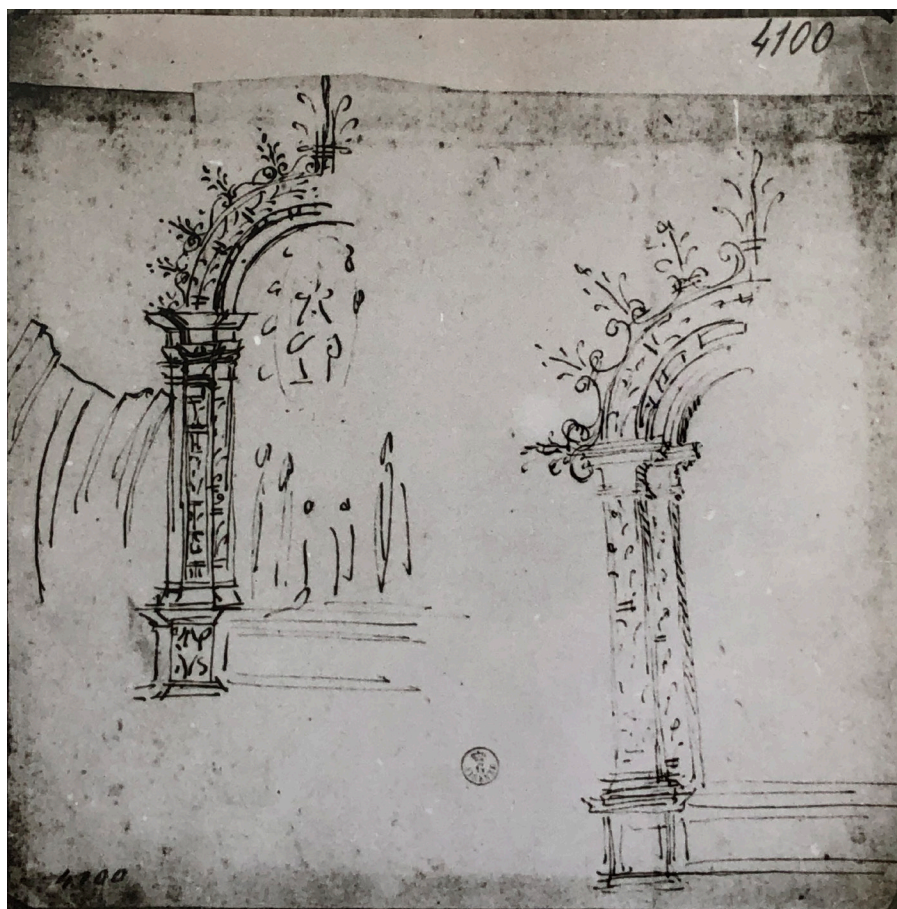


Fig. 13: Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane attr., *Two Sketches of Arched Frames*, ca. 1500.
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, inv. no. 4100 A.
Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici.



Fig. 14: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Adoration of the Christ Child by the Shepherds*, 1485. Florence, Santa Trinita, Sassetta Chapel. Photo by Antonio Quattrone.



Fig. 15 Giuliano da Sangallo, *High Altar Ensemble*, 1492, 1512.
Prato, Santa Maria delle Carceri. Photo by Giacomo Brogi.



Fig. 16: Nofero di Antonio Noferi, *Brandmark on the Sculptures' Framework*, ca. 1515.
Florence, Bigallo. Photo by Lucia Dori.